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This Topical Digest aims to provide easy access to relevant EPRS publications on EU-Turkey relations.

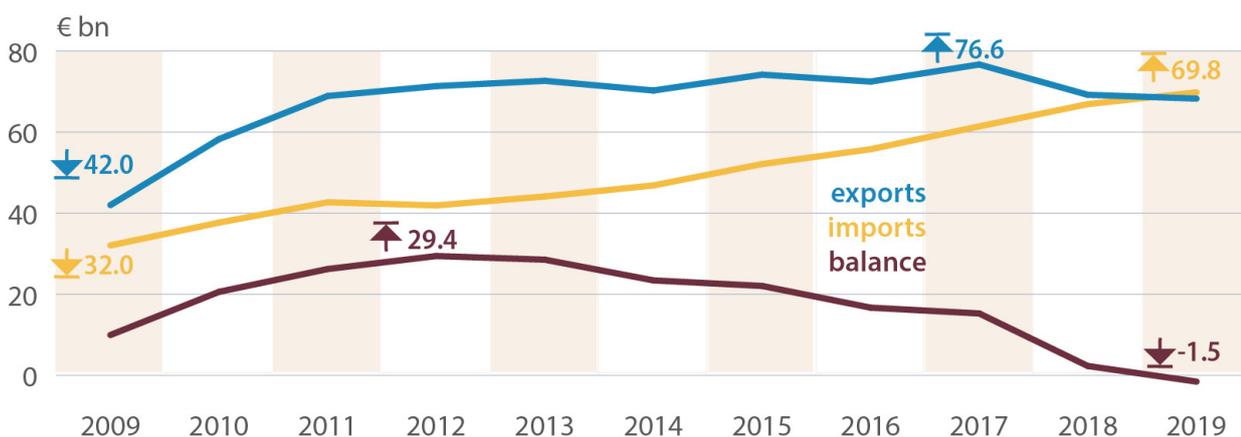
Turkey's membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Group of Twenty (G20) is a measure of its importance in the global political and economic context. Turkey is the EU's fifth largest trading partner, while the EU is Turkey's largest. Turkey joined the Council of Europe in 1949 and was also one of the founding members of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1973.

On 14 April 1987, Turkey applied for full membership of the European Union, but was officially recognised as a candidate only on 12 December 1999. Negotiations formally began on 3 October 2005. However, the Council conclusions of 26 June 2018 [concerning Turkey](#) noted the 'continuing and deeply worrying backsliding on the rule of law and on fundamental rights', that negotiations had come to a standstill, and that therefore 'no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing'.

The [Ankara Association Agreement](#) providing for the progressive establishment of a Customs Union was signed on 1 September 1963 and [provisions for the final phase](#) entered into force in 1995; an [additional protocol](#) to the Ankara Agreement was signed in 1970. Even though Turkey signed a protocol extending its customs union to the 10 new EU Member States in 2005, it still [refused](#) to open its ports and airports to Cyprus. Accordingly, on 11 December 2006 the Council [suspended negotiations](#) on eight chapters related to the issue and decided not to close any chapters until Turkey fulfils its obligations under the protocol.

The European Parliament shows a continued interest in EU-Turkey relations, on issues such as the future of the [EU-Turkey Customs Union](#) and the implementation of the [Facility for Refugees in Turkey](#). The EP [resolution](#) on the Commission's 2019-2020 country reports on Turkey, adopted in May 2021, stressed that modernisation of the Customs Union – based on strong conditionality related to human rights and fundamental freedoms – could be beneficial for both parties, and would keep Turkey economically and normatively anchored to the EU. The rule of law, democratic values and women's rights remain the EU's main concerns, as [recalled](#) by the European Parliament resolution of 19 May 2021.

Figure 1 - EU imports from and exports to Turkey, 2009-2019 (€ billion)



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[Peace and security in 2021: The EU's evolving relations with Turkey](#)

Briefing by Hannah Ahamad Madatali, EPRS, July 2021

Mapping the EU's changing relationship with Turkey, by sketching out the background to EU-Turkey relations and the matters that have been prominent, this briefing offers an overview of the evolving role of the Commission and of the European Council's approach to EU-Turkey relations. It also outlines the positions adopted by the European Parliament over time.

[Turkey chapter](#) at p. 59 in [Mapping threats to peace and democracy worldwide: Normandy Index 2021](#)

Study by Elena Lazarou and Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, July 2021

Turkey ranks 118th in the Normandy Index, a ranking that reflects substantial security threats. The country scores lower than the European average on 10 of the 11 indicators, especially on violent conflict, terrorism and democratic processes.

[The European Council and Turkey: Searching for a positive agenda](#)

Briefing by Suzana Anghel with Dawid Fusiek, EPRS, June 2021

Turkey has featured regularly on the agenda of the European Council in recent years, notably in the context of the migration crisis and military operations in Syria, and as a result of an increasingly tense situation in the eastern Mediterranean, which led to a significant military build-up at sea during the summer of 2020. In all these cases, the European Council (re)acted swiftly, ensuring that the views of the Member States were taken into consideration.

[Turkey: 2019 and 2020 country reports](#)

'At a glance' note by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, May 2021

Turkey's relations with the European Communities/Union date back to 1959, with milestones including the Ankara Association Agreement (1963) and Customs Union (1995). Turkey is a key strategic partner of the EU on issues such as migration, security, counter-terrorism and trade. However, following democratic backsliding, in June 2018 the Council of the EU decided to freeze accession negotiations.

[Russia-Turkey relations: A fine line between competition and cooperation](#)

Briefing by Martin Russell, EPRS, February 2021

While Turkey benefits from cooperating with Russia, overall its economic and security interests are best served by staying aligned with the West. Therefore, Ankara is unlikely to want to leave NATO or its customs union with the EU.

[Turkey and stormy waters in the eastern Mediterranean](#), Chapter 9 by Branislav Stanicek in [Ten issues to watch in 2021](#)

Study edited by Etienne Bassot, EPRS, January 2021

Since the discovery of offshore natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean in the early 2000s, Turkey has challenged its neighbours with regard to the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones and destabilised the whole region through its illegal exploration and military interventions, in violation of international law. Ankara has used military force and intimidation, including repeated violations of the territorial waters and airspace of neighbouring countries, as well as bilateral deals, such as its November 2019 memorandum of understanding with the Libyan Government of National Accord, which purports to determine new maritime boundaries.

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EU-Turkey customs union: Modernisation or suspension?

Briefing by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, December 2020

Turkey is the EU's fifth largest trading partner, while the EU is Turkey's largest. The association agreement concluded between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Turkey in 1963 was an interim step towards the country's accession to the EEC, membership of which it had applied for in 1959. The EU-Turkey customs union came into force in 1995.

Turkey: Remodelling the eastern Mediterranean: Conflicting exploration of natural gas reserves

Briefing by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, September 2020

Since the discovery of offshore natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean in the early 2000s, Turkey has challenged its neighbours with regard to international law and the delimitation of their exclusive economic zones, and destabilised the whole region through its illegal drilling and military interventions.

Hagia Sophia: Turkey's secularism under threat

'At a glance' note by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, July 2020

Turkey's decision to convert Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque, announced on 10 July 2020, created a wave of protest from international and EU authorities, who fear for religious freedom and the republican secular tradition in Turkey. Foreign affairs ministers condemned this decision at the Council of the European Union meeting of 13 July 2020.

EU-Turkey relations in light of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis

Briefing by Branislav Stanicek, EPRS, March 2020

The crisis is both a stress-test and an opportunity for the EU to clarify its own strategic position in order to develop a new consolidated geopolitical blueprint for the whole Mediterranean and Middle East that would not only tackle the ambition and behaviour of regional powers such as Turkey, but also place the EU on an equal footing with other global powers active in the region.

Turkey chapter at pp. 31-33 in Religion and the EU's external policies: increasing engagement

In-depth analysis by Philippe Perchoc et al., EPRS, February 2020

For decades, Turkey's secular model was compared to the French model. Nevertheless, the use of the word *laïcité* (or secularity) is misleading: in the French case, it embodies the mutual independence of state and religion from one another. In Turkey, the independence is one-sided, as the state is independent from religion but is actively involved in the daily management of the various religions. In the French model, the state does not promote any religion, as all are supposed to be equal, but in the Turkish model Sunni Islam is de facto promoted by the state.

Legislative Train Schedule carriage on the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III)

Single table summarising the state of play, by analogy to the arrivals-departures board of a railway station.

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